

Log 911

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: May 11, 1978

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Forwarded to:

Honorable Langhorne M. Bond  
Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
Washington, D. C. 20591

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

A-78-34  
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On December 13, 1977, Air Indiana Flight 216, a DC-3, crashed on the Dress Regional Airport, Evansville, Indiana, shortly after takeoff from runway 18. The airplane was on an IFR charter flight to transport the Evansville University basketball team to Nashville, Tennessee. The 27 passengers and 2 flight crewmembers were killed.

The National Transportation Safety Board's investigation has disclosed that Evansville Tower personnel who were working the combined local/ground position and the flight data position were not aware of the new weather observation being displayed on the Electrowriter in the tower cab. As a result, incorrect weather information was transmitted to aircraft under tower jurisdiction. Although neither this misinformation nor other air traffic control services contributed to the accident, the Safety Board believes that it illustrates a potentially serious shortcoming in the system for disseminating current weather information to flightcrews and warrants corrective action.

The official sky condition and visibility, as recorded by the Evansville National Weather Service Station, pertinent to this accident were:

1852 c.s.t. - Sky condition--measured ceiling, 400 feet overcast; visibility--2 miles.

1907 c.s.t. - Sky condition--indefinite ceiling, 300 feet sky obscured; visibility--1 1/2 miles; remarks, visibility northeast--3/4 mile.

1915 c.s.t. - Sky condition--indefinite ceiling, 300 feet sky obscured; visibility--3/4 mile.

2255-A

AAE-720

The 1852 observation was being broadcast on the Automated Terminal Information Service (ATIS) "Information Quebec." The 1907 observation had been available to Evansville Tower personnel on the Electrowriter equipment from 1910 c.s.t.--2 minutes before initial contact with departing Flight 216. The 1915 observation was available in the tower about 4 minutes before Flight 216 was cleared for takeoff. At least three flights either arriving or departing Evansville were issued incorrect sky condition information during a 9-minute period. This was the period before the latest weather was recorded as part of "Information Romeo" on the ATIS about 1919 c.s.t. Throughout this period, Evansville Tower visibility values had been taken, relayed to the weather station, and issued to aircraft in radio contact.

Evansville Tower controllers stated that they normally expect to receive updated weather information from the weather station after having passed tower visibility values to the weather observer. Possibly, as a result of distraction or other duties, however, controller expectations did not prove sufficient to assure that the weather information necessary to the proper control of traffic was being used.

FAA Handbook 7110.65A, paragraph 40, requires that controllers remain aware of current weather information needed to perform air traffic control duties. Paragraph 980 of the Handbook requires that the official ceiling and visibility be issued to departing IFR aircraft when weather is below VFR conditions or highest takeoff minima, whichever is greater. This control function was not performed for Flight 216 or a Delta Airlines flight that had departed immediately before Flight 216. The Handbook contains a similar requirement to issue weather information to arriving aircraft and may be more critical than for departing aircraft. The United States Air Force has a requirement for a time-delayed aural alarm associated with Electrowriter-type equipment. The alarm notifies the controller that new weather information is available. The delay feature allows the controller to retrieve the message and override the alarm before it sounds. An optional alerting light feature is also available for Air Force facilities.

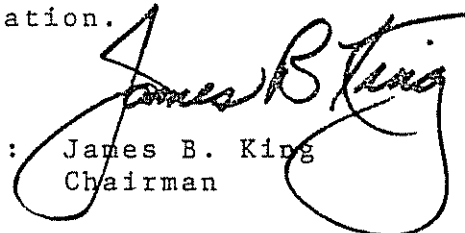
We believe that an alerting device on weather disseminating equipment, such as the Electrowriter, would reduce the need for frequent controller monitoring of equipment and would assure that the controllers were aware of a message as soon as it was transmitted.

Accordingly, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Aviation Administration:

Install an alerting feature on all existing and new equipment used for disseminating essential weather information in all air traffic control facilities, at positions that require timely information and at positions that are required to issue current weather information as a part of their air traffic control functions. (Class II Priority Action) (A-78-34)

KING, Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, and DRIVER, Members, concurred in the above recommendation.

By: James B. King  
Chairman

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "James B. King". The signature is written over the typed name and title.